

Moniz-Carroll, Rhonda

From: Sandra Eagle <sandra@sandraeagle.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 10, 2015 7:58 PM
To: JudTestimony
Subject: Testimony in Favor of HB6848
Attachments: DV testimony march 2015.docx

Sandra Eagle, LCSW, psychotherapist in support of

re: HB6848 An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence

Chairman Coleman, and Tong, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Sandra Eagle and I am a psychotherapist with 40 years experience working with couples, families, and children, with expertise in domestic violence and trauma. My practice is in Greenwich, CT.

I am here in support of HB6848, and to commend the Governor and our legislators for recognizing that we need legislation to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence. It is urgent and essential that this legislation becomes law as the highest rate of fatalities in domestic violence situations is exactly at the time the mother files for a restraining order, and the court becomes complicit in that tragedy in allowing the threatening spouse to keep his gun.

However, the need for the legislation reveals the lack of training of our family court players in issues of domestic violence. You can legislate the removal of the gun, but you cannot legislate each of the myriad of judgments and interventions that are made by the family court, that either empower or disempower the abuse and harm depending on the sensitivity to domestic violence issues of the courtroom players. Indeed, best practices and ways of creating safety for children and families continue to emerge from the fields of domestic violence and trauma, that tragically are not reaching our family court. Today, the greatest threat to the safety of victims of domestic violence lies in the current culture of the family court, where at an alarming rate, decisions are made that institutionalize the silencing of the child and strip the child of his mother's ability to protect him. We know that nationally, one out of six children are raped, and that much of that is incestuously, and yet in the first study looking at the corresponding decisions of the family court, it was found that in the cases where a mother alleged sexual abuse by the father, a 100% of the time sole custody was granted to the father.

In the media we see that a child is so terrified to speak, that the child often doesn't disclose until he's an adult, but that when a child does speak the jig is up, the secret is out, and adults privy to the disclosure are held criminally liable for not reporting. Not so in family court, where a mother's disclosure is framed as her attempt to alienate the child from his father, and even when the child speaks, his disclosure is treated as one manipulated by the mom. This flies in the face of the reality that children need and seek relationship with their fathers, and that a divorcing mother absolutely wants and needs her child to be safe with his father. The nature of abuse is that the children are terrorized, and silenced if they dare speak, and the mother is attacked for interceding to protect the children. Our family court institutionalizes the abusive paradigm, silencing the child and maligning the mother, leaving the child absolutely isolated in his terror and despair, no longer having his mother to go to as she is rendered powerless by the court to help him. Chronic activation of the stress hormones of fight, flight, freeze, attack our immunology, and lead to structural alterations in the brain's memory and fear processing centers, resulting in impaired cognitive performance, chronic anxiety, and depression, i.e. a traumatized child. In empowering the unsafe parent, the family court becomes complicit in defining the child's life as one of trauma, and in the father using his control over the child to control the mother. when with knowledge and skills, the court could be promoting healing in families.

This Act to Protect Victims of Domestic Violence is essential, and urgent, in disarming a violent parent threatening to harm the safe parent or their children. But for it to truly be an act to protect victims of domestic violence it must legislate that the courtroom players the GALs, child's attorney, courtroom evaluator, referee, etc. be trained and experienced in the elements involved in domestic violence and creating safety for the children and the safe parent. I ask that you amend this bill to include such a provision, or create such legislation as soon as possible.

And if you let me know how I can be part of helping craft such legislation, I'd be honored to be part of the effort.

Thank you,

Sandra Eagle, LCSW

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for a great education on the problem, a 6 minute video from Legal Empowerment Appeals Project, addressing the issue <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GABQofuGhiw>